

**Heritage Impact Assessment: portion 5 Dornoch Farm,  
Balgowan District**



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## **1. Introduction**

Debbie Whelan of Archaic Consulting was contacted by Vanessa Archer, acting as agent for the client, with regard to assessing the structures on Dornoch farm, Balgowan in terms of the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Heritage Act no 4 of 2008. Ms Archer's client wishes to carry out complete demolition. The proposed owner is intending to construct a working stud farm on the site, and needs as much coverage for this as possible.

Debbie Whelan visited the site together with Vanessa Archer on May 3 2011 and inspected the buildings. On scrutiny, it was obvious that some of the buildings were of recent construction, with one structure, possibly the 'old barn' hovering around the age of 60 years.

As a whole, the farmstead is compact, with utilitarian buildings situated at an elevated position to the west, and the house down the slope on the east. None of the structures had much architectural merit, built as modest farm buildings.

## **2. Methodology**

Prior to site inspection, the land registers had been consulted and the author was aware that the farm Dornoch had been consolidated in 1957 by its then owner, Robert Armstrong. This information would corroborate the general date of the buildings on the site, and would thus put the oldest at 54 years. Thus, in an effort to be expedient, time was spent attempting to ascertain the date of the buildings. The Surveyor General office in Mowbray was contacted for copies of flight plans in the area in the 1940s and 1950s. These were sent through to Archaic Consulting, and no aerial photographs appear to have been taken in the 1940s and 1950s. Contacting Barbara Acutt who worked for Clive Barlow for many years was unsuccessful, and eventually the children of Robert Armstrong were traced. Neither Murray Armstrong nor Pauline McCarthy had much memory of the farm, nor the buildings, apart from the house burning down during transfer between Armstrong and the subsequent owner at the end of the 1960s. It was thus decided to assume that the 'Old Barn' was over 60 years old, and assess it as such.

It must be noted that both the 'Old Barn' and the Servants Quarters are very long buildings, and photographing them in their entirety is problematic.

### 3. History of the site

Dornoch was alienated from Boschhoek 1219, which was granted in 1852 to Jan Abram Mauch and Lucas Cornelius Janse van Vuuren. Subdivision B, which ultimately formed part of Dornoch was created in 1892 and sold by the then owner, Edward Way to Stephen Nurden. On this, Subdivision A was sold to Florence Rennie in 1930, as well as Subdivision C in 1937. In 1940 Subdivision 16 of 357 acres was sold to Charles Brownlee, and in 1952 Nurden sold the remainder of 412 acres to Charles Barlow.

Florence Brownlee transferred all of her properties to Robert Armstrong in 1956. These were consolidated with parts of the adjoining property, Geelhoutboom<sup>1</sup>, to form Dornoch 14804. It is strongly suspected that the structure on the site date to this consolidation. In 1968 Robin Johnson purchased Dornoch, now 679 acres.

### 4. Assessment of structures



**Fig 1: 'Google' earth photograph showing complex of buildings**

**1: Barn complex and stables**

**2: 'Old barn'**

**3: Servants quarters**

**4: Shed**

**5: Thatched house**

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<sup>1</sup> This property was owned by James Methley, and it was here that the legendary Methley Plum was cultivated. The old Methley homestead, Newstead, is directly across the road, close to the Dornoch house.



## 4.1 Barn complex and stables

This is a collection of mixed material buildings: a long open shed lies parallel to the 'Old Barn' and this is seen to the left in Figure 2 below, as well as from the end on in Figure 3. It is a portal frame structure of recent construction, and has little merit. Close to this is a mixed construction building housing stables, a garage workshop space and a cottage. This is built of concrete block, amongst other materials, and has an IBR roof and standard steel window sections. The walls are bagged and plastered and there is no evidence of any forms of bonding apart from stretcher. This is seen to the right in Figure 2 and the left in Figure 3. Figure 4 shows the length from the driveway approach. It has not been maintained and needs some work. To the south, facing the rough yard space, are a few large loose-boxes and feed rooms. Figures 6 and 7 show older sheds in the yard.



*Fig 2 (left) and Fig 3 (right): Showing long open shed and mixed use building*



*Fig 4: Length of mixed use building*



*Fig 5: Cranked corrugated iron shed at rear*

The structures in this complex are utilitarian, ill-maintained, and would be difficult to reuse. It is doubted that any of these is over the age of 60 years, although the shed in Figures 6 and 7 are probably reasonably close. There is little cohesion in material, style and scale, and it is evident that these structures have been incrementally planned, as one would expect in an agricultural environment.



**Fig 6: Hipped, corrugated iron shed at rear**



**Fig 7: interior of loose-box**

### **Significance of the Barn Complex and stables**

significance	local	regional	national	international
architectural	low	low	low	low
historical	low	low	low	low
technical	low	low	low	low
scientific	low	low	low	low
social	low	low	low	low

*This complex has little architectural merit, and has little evidence of historical, social, technical or scientific importance in the area, the region or nationally.*

#### **4.2 ‘Old barn’**

This structure is perhaps the most enigmatic. It is a long building of masonry construction, under a pitched corrugated iron roof. It ends right on the southern boundary of the farm. The short elevations have louvred timber ventilators to the roof space. The long elevation has been much altered, with an anachronistic bay window (see Fig ) added to the southern end. Double meranti cottage pane doors and flanking windows sit close to a painted timber double door. Internally, the space has been fragmented into habitable rooms, and the floor tiled.

Again, it is strongly suspected that this formed part of farm construction in the 1950s and falls short of the 60 year protection. It is a long building, its length orientated north-south, limiting its adaptive reuse. There is no diagnostic evidence to qualify its age as being over 60 years old.



**Fig 8: Old Barn, north end**



**Fig 9: Long elevation to east**





**Fig 10 and 11: Old Barn veranda to east showing varying door types**



**Fig 12: New bay window added to Old Barn**

### **Significance of the 'Old Barn'**

It is not confirmed that this building is older than 60 years, given that its components are traditional and typical of utilitarian buildings of this nature. Its original fabric has been much altered, as well as the internal spaces, leaving little integrity where the envelope has been manipulated using a series of unrelated components which do not work together. Were this structure a functioning barn, as its architectural language suggests, then this has been materially altered, leaving little of any merit. In all this building has little to merit its retention.

<b>significance</b>	<b>local</b>	<b>regional</b>	<b>national</b>	<b>international</b>
<b>architectural</b>	low	low	low	low
<b>historical</b>	low	low	low	low
<b>technical</b>	low	low	low	low
<b>scientific</b>	low	low	low	low
<b>social</b>	low	low	low	low

*This building has little architectural merit, and has little evidence of historical, social, technical or scientific importance in the area, the region or nationally.*

### 4.3 Servants quarters

This is another long low building which sits adjacent to the Old Barn. It is a series of compartments which housed servants in the past, again utilitarian in nature and consisting of bagged and painted stretcher bond brickwork and standard steel windows under a corrugated sheeting roof.



**Fig 13: Servants quarters seen from Old Barn**



**Fig 14: Servants quarters- east elevation**



**Fig 15: Servants quarters from thatched house**



**Fig 16: Servants quarters-east elevation**

This is a purely utilitarian building of uncertain age. As it stands, it has minimal aesthetic or architectural merit.

#### Significance of the Servant's Quarters

significance	local	regional	national	international
architectural	low	low	low	low
historical	low	low	low	low
technical	low	low	low	low
scientific	low	low	low	low
social	low	low	low	low

*This building has little architectural merit, and has little evidence of historical, social, technical or scientific importance in the area, the region or nationally.*



#### 4.4 Shed

This building is of recent construction, with a low mono-pitch corrugated sheeting roof on masonry construction with large steel section openings. There is little merit in its retention.



**Fig 17: The shed from the thatched house**



**Fig 18: The shed from the servants quarters**

#### Significance of the shed

significance	local	regional	national	international
architectural	low	low	low	low
historical	low	low	low	low
technical	low	low	low	low
scientific	low	low	low	low
social	low	low	low	low

*This building has little architectural merit, and has little evidence of historical, social, technical or scientific importance in the area, the region or nationally.*

#### 4.5 Thatched house



**Fig 19: Thatched house viewed from the shed**

This building was reconstructed after a fire in the late 1960s. It consists of a number of structures including a garage and a cottage. It is thatch on masonry construction with a number of unstable brick chimneys. It does not fall within the protection of the Heritage Act, and has little merit to promote it.

#### Significance of the thatched house

significance	local	regional	national	international
architectural	low	low	low	low
historical	low	low	low	low
technical	low	low	low	low
scientific	low	low	low	low
social	low	low	low	low

*This complex has little architectural merit, and has little evidence of historical, social, technical or scientific importance in the area, the region or nationally.*



## 5. Conclusion

*Despite the inconclusive age of the buildings on the farm, inspection reveals that, in the opinion of the author, there is little to be lost should they be destroyed. The house is constructed in the 1960s and has little to recommend it, the shed is also of recent construction, the servants quarters are of an age, but serve as utilitarian spaces which are inappropriate with regard to contemporary labour requirements. The Old Barn, possibly the one meritorious building, is badly and extensively altered, and has lost any internal spatial integrity it may have once had. Finally, the complex of agricultural buildings consisting of portal frame steel structures and older timber framed storage barns, is characterized by ill-maintenance and incremental addition.*

*There are many other well constructed, meritorious farmsteads in the Midlands region, which have constant public access and exposure. This farmstead does not have the nostalgic nor historic quality to join these.*

*In the opinion of this author, demolition of the structures on Dornoch Farm is recommended.*